

What exactly does “siting” mean? In architecture, it defines the relationship of the house to the land. How the home sits.

How it’s rotated. How the land comes up to meet it. How the land is modified to make the house location successful. And most importantly, for me as an architect, how the inside of every single space, every corner of every room, and every eye level within the house relates to the surrounding views and the revolving sun.

If you are looking at architectural floor plans or preparing to design your own custom home, how rooms relate to each other and how those spaces relate to the property and views are part of the siting process. The perfect floor plan can happen when you start this design process from scratch. When you select your land, observe the views, watch the sun, and understand the best approach to the property, you can determine a floor plan that maximizes all opportunities and connections. When this occurs, amazing things can happen. You can drive up to your home and see through to the mountain range beyond, from

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PERFECT SITING

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All images courtesy of Purple Cherry Architects

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the front door through the full depth of the house. You can stand at one point within the plan and see clear through in both directions. You can control the large picture window that frames the setting sun. You can experience the best sunrise ever from your bed. You can make these fantastic paintings in nature happen.

Whether you're siting a home in a subdivision or on 100 acres of isolated land, how you rotate, flip, or angle any part or whole of a house makes a difference to how you feel when you are inside the home. The way the sun enters a room, the way the trees provide shade, the sense of privacy where necessary, or the planned obstruction of unwanted views and noise are the direct product of proper siting.

Generally, homes of the mid-20th century and earlier were not designed to fit the land. They were mostly internal floor plans with no consideration of the surrounding landscape or site shape. When you enter these older homes, they can feel closed-in, awkward, encapsulated, disconnected, and generally just not serene. Near the end of this century, we started understanding the significance of our emotional connection to nature, and how it benefits our health, especially in the workplace. Defined as biophilic design, we learned that our human connection to nature is incredibly important to our emotional health. Since this time, homes have begun to evolve to embrace the surrounding site.

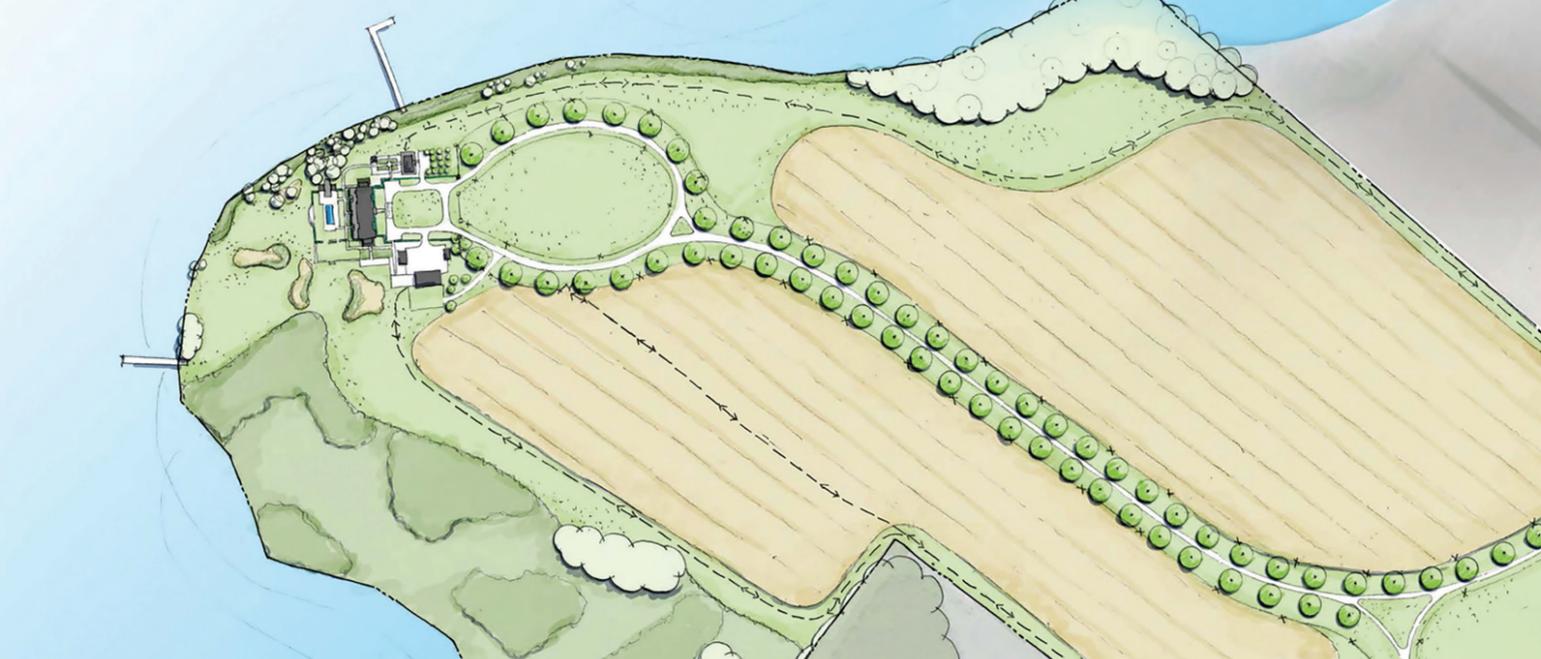
It takes both a civil engineer and an architect to address a property. Both bring significance to a home project. But there is a difference in how these two professionals look at the land. The best plan is to get the architect's and engineer's thoughts on the property before purchase. They both bring to the table completely different ways of thinking.

The civil engineer performs an incredibly important role in property development, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas. A talented engineer focuses on road access and traffic safety, slope steepness for driving and walking, rock in the ground and excavation, water runoff and stormwater management requirements, gravity-fed sewage systems where possible, managing forest, and minimizing cut and fill. Cut and fill describes how much dirt excavation is required for the property improvements and how much additional dirt is needed. Ideally, the cut should be spread as fill on the same property. This engineer's goal saves money.

The talented architect looks at the land like a canvas, desiring to place a home in the perfect spot and then places the brush strokes between the structure and the environment. The artistic side of the architect looks for good and not-so-good views. What gets connected and what gets blocked. Where the sun moves throughout the day, and how that impacts the scenery. Where the best views are

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and how the land is shaped and used in the house design. Having an architect with you as you look at property will open your eyes to all the possibilities.

To understand what or where is the right site, you first need to understand your goals. On mountain property, the initial questions are price point and land area, then proximity to modern conveniences. Do you want a view up to the mountains, or to be on the mountain, looking down? Often, lower-level properties have restricted sunlight, primarily if located in a general hilly area. Mountaintop properties have wind. The north side of a hill gets limited direct sun. The west side gets intense sun in the afternoons, and the TV can be in full sun. Architecture manages many of these complex concerns. Folding shutters on the screened porch for wind. Deep roof overhangs for western sunsets.

When siting elements and views, the interior relationships of people and spaces are equally important to the exterior siting. Understanding the vertical height of both the homeowners and the views beyond is critical. When standing with a 6' 5" husband and 5' 3" wife, I always am aware that they view the world differently. So squat down or stand on a chair to understand your partner's view, as it can be radically different. This awareness is so essential to the selection of ceiling and window head heights early in the design process.

Further, knowing if the view is down the hill, straight out, or up towards the mountain top, or all three, defines the expanse of the glass on the exterior wall. If the homeowner is seated at a dining room table or standing at a kitchen sink, it further impacts the design and vertical rotation. All of these factors play into the best siting for the overall home.

The view influences the furniture and fireplace placement in the home. Every piece of furniture needs to take advantage of an incredible view. Think about this simple fact. If a table is perpendicular to a window, all diners can enjoy the scenery except one. If the table runs parallel to the view, diners along the long side have no panorama. These fundamental thought processes come into every element of incredible design. Ask yourself: are you a morning person? If the answer is no, don't site your bedroom on the eastern side of the house. Is the mountain view more desirable than the fireplace? I'll never understand fireplaces in the middle of the most beautiful views! Do you have a pool? Site the family room and kitchen directly to the pool view, while at the same time take into consideration pool chairs that will face the sun for sunbathing. This knowl-

edge helps site the pool orientation. The list of connections is endless in the mind of a talented architect.

Siting means how a building is placed or located on a property, and further, how it relates to the surrounding features. So, when selecting a location and orientation for a custom home, the ideal siting influences many components of the house design. You must first understand the pragmatic elements of the property. These elements, such as well and septic locations, access from the road, setbacks, slopes, and any easements or environmental restrictions, all affect the siting. You must understand the emotional aspects, both outside and inside the home, that influence siting. The list of incredible connections between the user and the environment is endless in the mind of a talented architect.

Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While Cathy revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, she is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts and her work serving the special needs community through the firm's Purposeful Architecture studio. An award-winning residential architecture and interior design firm specializing in exceptional homes and luxurious estates throughout the East Coast from Plymouth, MA to Warm Springs, VA, Cathy has grown her team two-fold in the past three years. Purple Cherry Architects truly loves the journey of bringing together their clients with stunning pieces of property where they can build the home of their dreams.

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